



SAEF expresses shock at the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Bill before the Botswana Parliament

The Southern African Editors' Forum (SAEF) is deeply alarmed at what is about to happen in Botswana – the thwarting and suppression of free expression among its people and by extension the media through the contemplated Criminal Procedure and Evidence Bill.

SAEF joins the Botswana Editors' Forum (BEF) and the African Editors Forum in calling on President Mokgweetsi Masisi to withdraw the Bill before Parliament and allow for wider public consultations as it is bound to have serious ramifications not only on the people of Botswana but the whole SADC region because of clear and known interconnectedness between the people and institutions of the country.

The Bill in its current format is dangerous as it forces the disclosure of information by citizens including journalists and allows intelligence officers to use fake identities while providing them immunity from prosecution.

A lack of oversight on the intelligence operatives is itself frightening, especially in a county we had come to regard as a beacon of good governance.

The Bill will also introduce a culture of arrogance and willy-nilly condemnation and execution of innocent citizens reminiscent of the colonial and apartheid-era.

What Botswana is advocating in the Bill is totally against the ethos and spirit of the SADC Protocol on Culture, Information and Sport to which Botswana and 15 other member states in the region are now signatories.

Four key articles and clauses in that sanctity document stand out for us and all the people of SADC and these are Articles 17(a), 18(4), 19(1) and 20 but especially the last two which speak about member states agreeing to “cooperate in improving the free-flow of information within the region” and ensuring the “freedom and independence of the media”.

We are worried as SAEF, and here we associate ourselves with both TAEF and BEF that the contemplated piece of legislation will negate all the gains made through the regionally, continentally, and globally acclaimed Protocol which is concomitant with the Windhoek Declaration.

Even without this Bill, there was already widespread assault on the media in Botswana. We shudder what will become of the media when this Bill becomes a law.

We hope Parliament in Botswana and also the State President will be responsive to public outcry and take the Bill out to the public for consultations.

Additionally, we call on the United Nations Human and Peoples Rights Commission, through the Office of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, and also the African Union Commission to take a stand and sanction Botswana.

Botswana, it is important to point out, does not have a Freedom of Information law. This by itself, even without this envisaged law has huge negative implications on the functions of the media and also on citizens' ability to access information and hold authorities accountable.

For a country that has a reputation of democracy, the absence of Freedom of Information law is a big failure on the part of authorities.

We call upon all journalists in the SADC region and the world over to come together in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Botswana.

SAEF together with other regional media freedom partners will as a matter of urgency be sending a delegation to Botswana in solidarity.

Enquiries:

Willie Mponda
SAEF Chairperson
Email: wmponda@gmail.com

Joseph Ailonga
SAEF Secretary General
Email: Joseph@alvigordon.com